

**Remarks for U.S. Ambassador David B. Shear
U.S. Consulate General Ho Chi Minh City's Fourth of July
Reception
White Palace
July 5, 2013**

Good evening.

Vice Chairman Hua Ngoc Thuan, friends from the Vietnamese government and military, the diplomatic corps and business community, representatives of civil society, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to our celebration of the 237th anniversary of American independence!

As we approach the 18th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, the relationship between the United States of American and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam has never been stronger.

Since our last Independence Day gathering, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius, and then-U.S.Trade Representative Ron Kirk have visited Vietnam. These visits demonstrate Vietnam's importance and reaffirm our commitment to engagement with Vietnam, Southeast Asia, and the Asia-Pacific region.

The economic relationship between our two nations continues to grow. Last year, trade between Vietnam and the United States totaled a remarkable \$22 billion, and the United States remains Vietnam's largest single market. I expect that this relationship will continue to expand – an important part of our shared objective of creating a strong, prosperous, and independent Vietnam.

The United States, Vietnam, and our other partners in the Trans-Pacific Partnership are entering the final stages of negotiating this game-changing free trade agreement. When we are done, we will have opened a market that will account for nearly 40 percent of global GDP and about one-third of all world trade.

We also have achieved progress on cooperation in regional diplomacy and security. We share a variety of common interests in the region and we are coordinating closely on our approaches to regional gathering like the ASEAN Regional Forum. We are helping in strengthen Vietnam's maritime law enforcement capabilities and we look forward to supporting Vietnam's participation in UN peacekeeping missions in 2014.

Increased bilateral trust and closer diplomatic cooperation allow us to discuss candidly areas in which we disagree. The two sides conduct a vigorous exchange on human rights and freedom of religion through our Annual Human Right Dialogue and through our day-to-day exchange at all levels. These frank conversations demonstrate our commitment to a long-term, multifaceted relationship.

The U.S. has recently announced increased assistance on climate change, a global challenge with particularly dire implications for Vietnam. I hope we can soon begin full implementation of programs to fulfill President Obama's commitment to "expand clean energy use and cut energy waste" under his new Action Plan on Climate Change. This will complement assistance to help Vietnamese communities adapt to climate change and mitigate the risk of disasters.

People-to-people diplomacy between the United States and Vietnam continues to improve each year. Currently, over 15,500 Vietnamese students are studying in the United States, up from 800 in 1995. Exchange programs between our countries are flourishing, from prestigious, traditional programs like Fulbright to unique, cutting-edge exchanges like Higher Engineering Education Alliance Program partnership among Intel, Arizona State, other U.S. companies and universities, and USAID. In the field of healthcare, since 2004, the United States has contributes more than half a billion dollars – most through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief – to help Vietnam strengthen its health systems.

Finally, I would like to say goodbye to Consul General An Le. An has been a good colleague for the last two years, and his hard work in Ho Chi Minh City has helped push the bilateral relationship forward. I will miss both you and Tam, and I wish both of you every future success.

Thank you all for coming tonight to help us celebrate our Independence Day. Please join me in toasting the friendship between the United States of American and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

___ *Ambassador and GOH take a glass* ___

___ *Ambassador raises his glass* ___

TOAST: To continued friendship between our great countries.

May our peoples enjoy happiness, prosperity, and peace.

--All drink--